



## Ways to Fight Winter Blahs

More people seek help for depression in January than they do in December. If you or your loved ones experience heightened boredom, a reluctance to take down the holiday decorations, or are feeling “the blues,” one of the following ideas might be just what you need to turn January into one of your favorite times of the year.

- **Prolong the holiday season.** Leave up your holiday decorations through the first week in January! Epiphany or Three Kings Day occurs on January 6. The Russian Orthodox Christmas doesn't happen until January 7. You can choose to celebrate it all.
- **Decorate...only differently.** If you're ready to pack away the Christmas stockings and holiday candles but still want decorations, celebrate mid-winter. Decorate with white twinkle lights, snowmen, and sparkly snowflakes to help you feel festive.
- **Have a mid-January party.** In Japan, all those who will celebrate their 20th birthday during the year are honored on Coming of Age day (the second Monday in January). The new adults attend parties dressed in their best. It can be likened to the old social debut parties of the aristocratic young. You can host a formal party with a few of your friends on this date. January 15 is also Hat Day in America. If you're not into formal wear, host

Find a reason to celebrate! See unusual holidays and observances: [www.brownielocks.com/january.htm](http://www.brownielocks.com/january.htm)

a party and offer a prize for the person wearing the most outlandish hat.

- **Take care of nature.** Tu Bi'shevat, or the Jewish festival of trees, stresses the need to take care of nature. It falls on the 15th day of the Jewish month of Shevat, which often occurs in January. The day is celebrated by planting trees and eating fresh and dried fruits. While planting trees generally needs to wait a month or two if you live in a cooler region, this is a good time of year to prune your deciduous trees.
- **Be active.** Experts recommend 30-60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. It doesn't have to be continuous movement. You can achieve 30 minutes of exercise by power-cleaning your house for 15 minutes in the morning, and walking around the block for 15 minutes in the afternoon. Activity combats depression and helps you feel better.
- **Spend time outside.** Half a million people suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD). The “Winter Blues” (a mild form of SAD) may affect even more people. Spending time outdoors during the day and arranging homes and workplaces to receive more sunlight may be helpful, according to Mental Health America. Bright light therapy helps some people. One study found that an hour's walk in winter sunlight was as effective as 2½ hours under bright artificial light.

These are just a few ideas to help you fight off mild post-holiday blues. There are many more. Ask your friends what they do to cope with winter blahs. If your “blues” are severe or prolonged, see your doctor and get professional help right away.

*Mental Health America. 2009.*



## Eat to Prevent Alzheimer's Disease

Want to keep your brain sharp for a really long time? Eat your fruits and veggies. Researchers from the University of Columbia found that certain eating patterns were protective against Alzheimer's disease. A brain-protective menu includes:

- Eating lots of plant-based foods, particularly:
- ✓ Cabbage, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, and cauliflower
  - ✓ Green leafy vegetables (e.g., spinach, dark green lettuce, and collard or mustard greens)
  - ✓ Tomatoes

- ✓ Nuts
- ✓ Fish

Eating very little or no:

- ✗ Red meats (beef, lamb, and pork)
- ✗ High-fat dairy foods (whole milk, cheese, cream, ice cream, and butter)

This same eating pattern is also linked to a lower risk of heart disease and cancer. A shift away from animal foods (which are high in saturated fats) and toward eating more plant-based foods is healthy for your whole body, including your brain.

*Tufts University Health and Nutrition Letter. Sept. 2009.*



## Add Activity to Your Day by Taking the Stairs!

It is easy to go through a whole day without getting much physical activity. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator is a quick way

to add physical activity to your day. It requires little additional time, no wardrobe change, and no costs for exercise clothes or equipment.

Athletes have been running up and down stadium steps as part of training for years. Taking the stairs is a great way to get in shape, improve cardiovascular function, improve your blood pressure levels, and strengthen and tone your leg muscles. Stair climbing is also a great way to help maintain a healthy weight.

Taking the stairs uses more calories per minute than most other forms of physical activity. The average man will burn about 150 calories in 10 minutes of stair climbing, or about the amount burned in a 20-minute brisk walk. Women will use slightly fewer calories.

If your building has a staircase, why not use it now? When you start climbing stairs for exercise begin slowly and gradually increase the number of stairs you climb. The more you go up and down the stairs, the stronger you'll become and, eventually, the easier it will be. If you have knee problems, arthritis, or a heart or lung condition, talk with your healthcare provider first before taking to the stairs.

If your staircase is unpleasant, ask your employer to dress it up

with better lighting, fresh paint, and artwork. If the stairwells are attractive, more people may be enticed to take the stairs too.

*National Naval Medical Center. 2009.*

### Exercise Safely

You've resolved to get more exercise. But if you have an underlying medical condition that makes exercising hard to do, such as asthma, arthritis, or diabetes, you might wonder how to implement that resolution. The American College of Sports Medicine has produced safe exercise guidelines for 40 common medical conditions. Called "Your Prescription for Health," the guidelines provide customized tips for getting started – including what exercises are right for you – and address cautions specific to your disease. For more information, visit [www.exerciseis-medicine.org](http://www.exerciseis-medicine.org).

## Legumes Help Control Blood Sugar Levels

Diabetes is a disorder of the metabolism – that is, the way the body uses digested food for growth and energy. Most of the food you eat is broken down into glucose, the form of sugar that's in the blood. Glucose is the main source of fuel for the body.

People with pre-diabetes have blood sugar levels that are higher than

normal (100-125 mg/dL with a fasting test), but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes (126 mg/dL or higher with a fasting test). Pre-diabetes raises the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. The good news is that people with pre-diabetes can do a lot to prevent or delay diabetes.

Studies have clearly shown that people can lower their risk of developing diabetes by losing as little as 5-7% of their body weight through diet and by increasing their physical activity. A recent study points to legumes – in particular, beans – as a way to control diabetes. In the study, people who ate more beans had lower blood sugar levels, lower insulin levels, and lower hemoglobin A1C levels than those who ate few beans. Keeping their blood sugar levels lower also helped them prevent diabetes (and its many complications)

as well as heart disease. All it took was eating half a cup of legumes a day. Chickpeas (garbanzo beans) had the biggest effect on lowering blood sugar levels.

*National Institutes of Health. 2009*

*University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter. Nov. 2009.*

### What's a Legume?

There are thousands of types of legumes, and they all have seed pods that split along both sides when ripe. Legumes include soybeans, lentils, beans, peas, and peanuts.



### ASK THE WELLNESS DOCTOR

**Q:** How can I stay active during the winter months?

**A:** Go to [www.wellsense.info/wn/ask-WinterActivity.pdf](http://www.wellsense.info/wn/ask-WinterActivity.pdf) to read the answer from Don Hall, DrPH, CHES.

To ask your question, email: [well@wellsense.com](mailto:well@wellsense.com), subject line: Ask the Wellness Doctor. Emails with any other subject line will be directed to the spam folder.